

Testimony – House Commerce Committee  
In Support of HD 4163 – Smokefree Air  
Amalie Helms  
June 26, 2007

Good Morning!

My name is Amalie Helms and I am from Grand Blanc. I stand before you today as an asthmatic for over 30 years, the mother of nearly five-year old twin asthmatics and the surviving step-daughter of a man who was diagnosed with cigarette-related lung cancer who died in September, 2005, of COPD and Pulmonary Hypertension which developed as complications of his lung cancer. Smokefree Air is vitally important to my family.

Asthma is a chronic disease that affects the airways carrying air in and out of the lungs. Environmental triggers cause an asthmatic's airways to react and get narrower so less air flows through their lungs.

As the mother of asthmatic twins, it is important to me to keep them in safe environments that protect their health. Unfortunately, there aren't actually a lot of places like that in our communities. In fact, we nearly lost Connor to an asthma attack induced by second-hand smoke. He was 2 years old and rode from Flint to West Branch in my step-sister's car. She's a smoker, but did not smoke on this trip with the boys in the car; however, the car had been smoked in previously and she had smoked earlier in the day and had the residual secondhand smoke on her clothes and in her hair. Connor's asthma got bad enough that he had to be evacuated from the family outing and back to Flint to try to stabilize him, but the damage was already done! No number of home breathing treatments were able to pull him out of the attack, so he was taken to the nearest emergency room. After hours of them working on him, they decided to admit, but the doctors on the floor wouldn't allow it because they didn't have the ability there to intubate him should it be needed. He had to be transported to another facility where they were able to provide the level of care his condition warranted.

No one blew smoke in his face. No one gave the two-year old a cigarette. They simply hugged him when smoke was in their clothes and hair and put him in the car for a drive. These are things any adult would do with a child they loved – pick them up and hug them and hold them close. And, unfortunately for my children, there are now family members that are banned from contact with my children as long as they remain smokers. This has caused great strife in the family, but had to be done to protect my boys' health.

We now know that asthmatic children who breathe secondhand smoke can have more frequent and more severe asthma attacks, while exposure to the secondhand smoke can cause children to develop asthma. In addition to worsening and creating asthma cases statewide, secondhand smoke also has immediate adverse effects on the cardiovascular system and causes cancer. One non-smoker dies of secondhand smoke for every eight

smokers. People whose partners smoke are nearly five times more likely to develop asthma in adulthood than those who are NOT exposed to secondhand smoke.

Asthma kills! Asthma is far more serious than the general public believes. According to the Asthma Initiative of Michigan over 700,000 adults in this state have asthma and over 230,000 of our state's children have asthma. This isn't just a child's disease!

Every day in the United States:

- 40,000 people miss school or work due to asthma
- 30,000 people have an asthma attack
- 5,000 people visit the ER due to asthma
- 1,000 people are admitted to the hospital due to asthma
- 14 people die from asthma

A recent Norwegian study revealed that exposure to secondhand smoke in the womb or during childhood substantially increases the risk of developing asthma and respiratory symptoms during adulthood. This study also found that combined total exposure to secondhand smoke during childhood may have accounted for nearly 25% of adult asthma cases. That suggests that nearly a quarter of cases could have been prevented if children were not exposed to passive smoking.

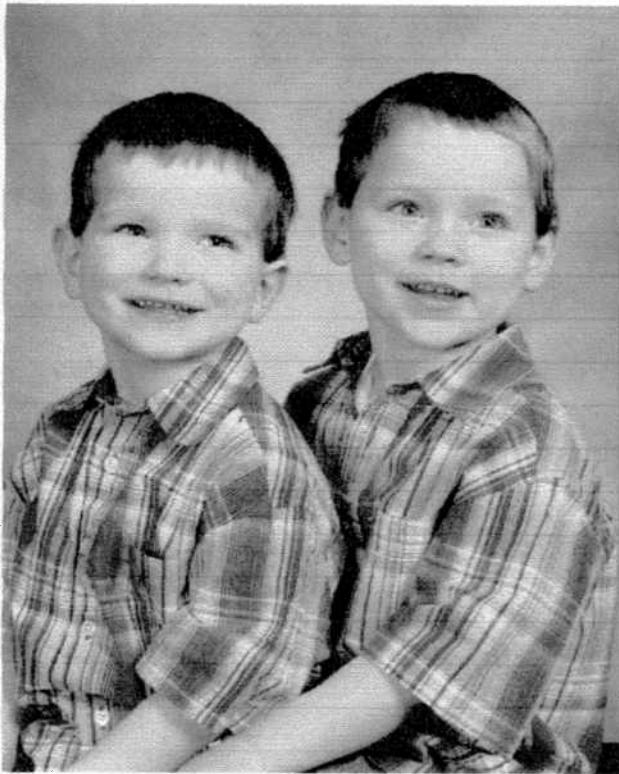
Something as simple as going out to dinner with the family can cause a family an untold amount of heartache if they have to walk through a smoking section to get to the restroom or salad bar and an asthma attack strikes. I waited tables in high school and I had to leave my job more times than I can remember because my asthma flared up too badly for me to continue to work and I was NOT given the option of a smokefree environment. Even working in the non-smoking section of most restaurants doesn't cut it because there aren't sufficient barriers to separate the spaces and truly keep the smoke out. When my family wants to go out for an evening we ONLY select smokefree establishments in the Flint area. That means that we mostly give all our dinner-related disposable income to places like Red Robin that have created safe environments for us to enjoy ourselves in.

I watched my step-father die because of the cigarettes he smoked. He was an amazing man. He played pro-football. He was a hunting and fishing guide. And the cigarettes he gave up well over a decade before he developed the cancer killed him. He spent the majority of his last year on this Earth as a recluse because there weren't many places he could go with his oxygen tanks that were truly smokefree. I don't to watch anyone else I love die like that or have to live their last days in such seclusion from the world.

I urge you to support this bill and help me make my community a safer place for me and my children and the other 900,000 plus asthmatics in the state of Michigan.

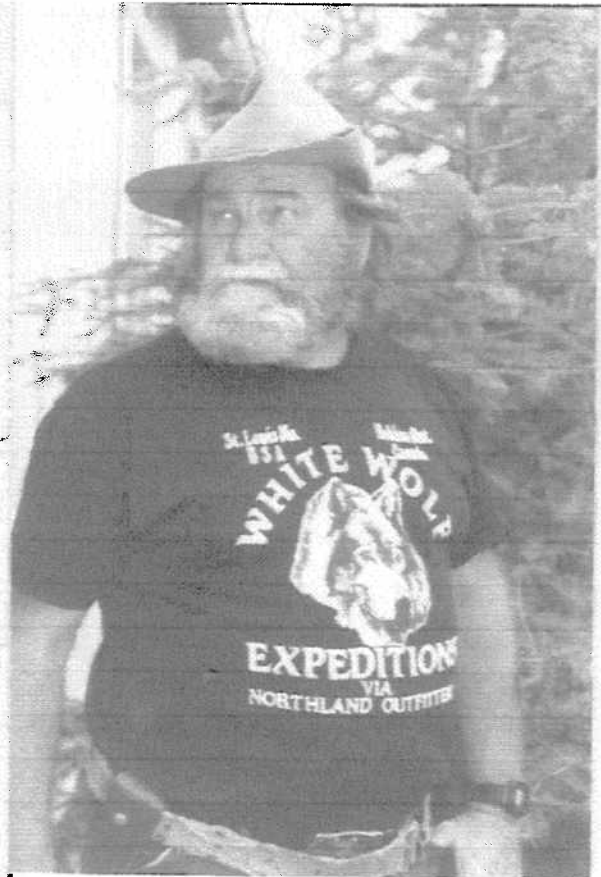
Thank you!

## *The Faces of Lung Disease*



Left: Phelan and Connor Helms, 5 year old asthmatics

Above: Connor Helms @ Hurley Regional Medical Center, August, 2004—as result of a secondhand smoke related asthma attack.



EJ Pogany—before and after the lung cancer. EJ was a pro-football player, a huntsman, a fisherman, and a great outdoorsman. He was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1999 and had his left lung removed at University of Michigan Hospital. He regained activity until April of 2004 when he developed COPD and died in September of 2005 from the COPD and Pulmonary Hypertension. We miss and